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Letters to the Editor of The Times

C.I.A. in Academic Areas

To the Editor:

It is fashionable at the moment in some of the very best quarters to regard the C.I.A. as an untouchable, unclean thing with which no self-respecting and ethically pure academic institution should have any contact. I submit that, on the contrary, for these institutions to refuse C.I.A. research contracts is self-defeating nonsense that is disadvantageous both to the academic world and to the C.I.A.

If the C.I.A. were to control the academic curricula or to report on the private lives and opinions of the students, or even the professors, one can see certain unpleasant and harmful consequences. But if the C.I.A. contracts to have a university report with complete independence on a question requiring research, we should welcome and encourage, not deny, the C.I.A.'s access to the source of objective information.

Use of Experts

We should likewise welcome, rather than discourage, the opportunity offered to universities of applying to serious public questions — which presumably the C.I.A. staff cannot answer — the specialized talents of their available experts. In most academic areas experts become experts by working in their fields with real life problems; they rarely become experts solely through study and reflection.

Indeed, we have only to read the headlines — whether they involve automotive safety or foreign affairs — to realize that often only the practical result will tell us which is the duffer and which the expert.

What we need is more, not fewer, tests of academic theory, and the C.I.A. (or any other source) does the universities a service — as well as vice versa — in arranging for research on current problems.

ALFRED E. DAVIDSON
Paris, May 10, 1966

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